

USAID's Victims of Torture Fund Presentation
by
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to share with you information on the U.S. Agency for International Development's efforts to implement the Torture Victims Relief Act through the Victims of Torture Fund. The Fund's mandate derives from the Torture Victims Relief Act (TVRA) which directs funding to the US Agency for International Development for four main categories of service: treatment, rehabilitation, training, and research. Envisioning a world free of torture where survivors, their families, and communities receive the support they need to quell their suffering and rekindle their connection to everyday life, the Fund primarily supports programs that help heal the psychological and physical trauma caused by torture.

Additionally, the Fund recognizes that communities, along with survivors, need to heal and recover. To this end, it supports programs that affirm the dignity of the survivor by restoring his or her position as a functioning and contributing member of the family and the community. The Fund also recognizes that restoring the dignity of those affected by torture involves strategies that help societies understand the consequences of torture. Through awareness raising and other meaningful activities, civil society can play an important role in protecting individuals against future acts of torture.

The Fund works through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) overseas that (1) provide direct services to torture-affected survivors, their families, and communities; (2) train individuals to treat and help restore the functioning of those affected by torture; and,

(3) increase the level of knowledge and understanding about the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitation methods.

In keeping with the Fund's mission, there are five principles guiding programming for torture survivors:

1. Improving access to and quality of services available to torture-affected communities.
2. Targeting individuals, who suffer reduced function due to direct or indirect exposure to torture, and communities with many such persons.
3. Building on existing community networks and resources.
4. Breaking the silence experienced by individuals and communities affected by torture.
5. Strengthening public response to torture in order to protect individuals against future incidents of torture.

Toward this end, the Fund administers treatment programs based in 30 countries that span four regions (Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Near East, and Europe and Eurasia). Currently, the Fund is overseeing a total of 27 agreements for treatment programs that include attention to the medical, psychological and social and needs of torture survivors and their families. Some of these programs include advocacy, training, technical assistance and research. Our 27 grantees are supporting another 99 local non-governmental organizations which are based in the communities where survivors live. This multiplier effect is one of the major achievements of the Fund as it strives to build the critical threshold of local services to support survivors as they seek to come to terms with the abuse they have suffered. The 2003-2004 Portfolio Synopsis gives a more detailed perspective on the Fund's programs. We are currently updating the information for a 2005 Portfolio Synopsis which we expect will be ready by early fall.

Funding Guidelines

Funds from the Victims of Torture Fund are transferred to USAID's overseas missions based on unsolicited proposals or mission requests for funding. The missions manage and negotiate grants and cooperative agreements with the agreed-upon partners. In keeping with its legislative mandate, the Victims of Torture Fund gives priority to programs that treat and rehabilitate torture-affected individuals.

Country-based programs are, for the most part, implemented through grants and cooperative agreements to domestic, foreign, and international nongovernmental organizations that are registered with USAID's Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation. In a majority of our programs, grantee organizations work in partnership with local NGOs capable of working with the needs of torture-affected survivors, their families, and communities. Unsolicited concept papers and proposals can be submitted to USAID missions or to the Victims of Torture Fund manager. Funding guidelines are published in our Portfolio Synopsis and website.

Program activities eligible for funding should aim to:

- Increase access to services that improve the status and function of torture-affected individuals, their families and communities.
- Improve quality of interventions for torture-affected individuals and communities through the study of the impact of interventions.
- Improve public awareness of the consequences of torture and specific actions that might reduce future incidents of torture.
- Increase the capacity of organizations and individuals involved in delivering services to torture-affected individuals, their families and communities.
- Increase knowledge and dissemination of findings related to long-term improvement in function.

In addition to our country program, the Fund is working with the Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis, Minnesota to strengthen the capacity of treatment centers both in terms of organizational viability, as well as the delivery of services and advocacy of human rights. Through this grant, CVT is strengthening the capacity of 17 treatment centers worldwide, building clinical capacity among community treatment resources in Cambodia, and building the capacity of psychosocial workers to provide counseling services to torture survivors in Sierra Leone. Additionally, the Fund is working with Boston University and CVT to strengthen the evaluation and research capacities of our partners to enable them to measure the impact of services.

In conclusion, the TVRA has been instrumental in the US Agency for International Development's involvement in promoting and improving the quality of services for torture survivors worldwide. We continue to build on our past successes and strive to give survivors the support they need to reduce their suffering and rekindle their connection to everyday life.